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SUBJECT: GERMAN GOVERNMENT SUCCEEDS IN WINNING LARGE

MAJORITY IN FAVOR OF NEW ISAF MANDATE

REF: 09 BERLIN 1554

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR GEORGE GLASS. REASONS: 1.4
(B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. An overwhelming majority of opposition Social Democrats (SPD) joined the government parties on February 26 in supporting a new one-year mandate for the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan, which increases the authorized troop ceiling by 850 (including a 350-soldier reserve). SPD Caucus Leader Steinmeier emphasized, however, that the SPD support was not based on confidence in the new government (which he said "it had not earned"), but rather on the clear "withdrawal perspective" contained in the mandate. While the mandate does not include a fixed date for withdrawal, it does specify that the handover of security responsibility of certain provinces in the north will begin in 2011. Even with the modest troop increase, the Bundeswehr is planning to implement an ambitious form of "partnering" with the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the north, based on the creation of two new "training and protection battalions." While the broad support for the new mandate is clearly a political victory for the government, the process of deciding on the appropriate level of the troop increase has revealed that in the months ahead, FM Westerwelle's Free Democrats could end up being as much of a challenge on the military engagement as the SPD. END SUMMARY.

BROAD MAJORITY IN FAVOR OF MANDATE

¶2. (SBU) The Bundestag vote was 429 in favor of the new mandate, 111 against, with 46 abstentions. The level of support, therefore, was only slightly less than what the government obtained for a simple technical roll-over of the mandate in December (446-105-43). While some opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD) leaders -- most notably Chairman Sigmar Gabriel -- had threatened in recent weeks to oppose any proposed increase in troops, the overwhelming majority of SPD parliamentarians in the end joined the two government parties -- Chancellor Merkel's Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and FM Westerwelle's Free Democratic Party (FDP) -- in supporting the new mandate (113-16-8). As usual, the entire Left Party caucus of 71 parliamentarians voted in block against the mandate, while the Greens split (8-21-35) as they have since Tornado reconnaissance aircraft were added to the ISAF mandate in 2007.

MODEST TROOP INCREASE

¶3. (C) As proposed by the government, the mandate increases the troop ceiling from the current 4,500 to 5,350. However, only 500 of the 850 additional troops are authorized for

full-time deployment; the other 350 are considered a "flexible reserve" which can only be deployed for "temporary periods" in reaction to "special situations" like providing security for the upcoming Afghan parliamentary elections. The mandate requires the government to brief the Bundestag Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees on any proposed deployment of the reserve. While the mandate does not require the committees to give their permission, some MOD officials fear that it could be politically impossible to deploy the reserve without the broad support of the committees. The mandate expressly allows the Bundeswehr to temporarily exceed the troop ceiling during changes in contingents, so the 350-troop reserve will not have to be used for this purpose.

HIGH-WATER MARK FOR THE MILITARY ENGAGEMENT

¶4. (C) This mandate, which runs for one year, expiring March 1, 2011, is almost certainly the high-water mark for the German military engagement in Afghanistan. The expectation is the government will come under great pressure to reduce the troop ceiling by at least some nominal amount when the mandate comes up for renewal next year, although much depends on the developments in Afghanistan over the next several months. Neither the mandate nor the accompanying justification includes a fixed date for complete withdrawal. However, it does include the goal to begin the handover of security responsibility of certain provinces in the north to the Afghans beginning in 2011 and expressly endorses President Karzai's goal to have the Afghan national security forces (ANSF) take over full responsibility for the country's

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security within five years (i.e., by the end of 2014). SPD Caucus Chair Steinmeier said in his Bundestag speech before the vote that the SPD would "follow very closely" whether the government "fulfilled its commitments" and "set the path for a step-by-step, successful withdrawal beginning in 2011." He emphasized that this "withdrawal perspective" had been decisive in the SPD's decision to support the new mandate.

RESTRUCTURING THE FORCE

¶5. (C) While the troop ceiling will only be increased by 500, the Bundeswehr plans to increase the number of "trainers" deployed in the field working alongside the Afghan National Army (ANA) in operations from the current 280 to 1,400. It will do this through restructuring of the current force and by creating two "training and protection battalions," one based in Mazar-e Sharif and the other in Kunduz. The new battalion in Mazar-e Sharif will be organized around the existing quick reaction force, while the battalion in Kunduz will be organized around the four existing infantry companies there, which currently report to the PRT commander. According to the MOD Joint Commitments Staff Afghanistan Team Leader COL Harald Gante, most of the 500 additional soldiers to be sent to Afghanistan will be the engineers, logistics personnel and other support staff necessary to create the new battalions. Only one additional platoon of infantry (30-40 soldiers) will be deployed. The new troops will start arriving in June and the battalions will be fully operational by October.

GERMAN "TRAINERS" TO DO PARTNERING

¶6. (C) Gante emphasized that the German "trainers" will in fact be carrying out the German concept of "partnering" with the ANA in the north. The German battalion in Mazar-e Sharif will partner with the new 3rd Brigade of the 209th ANA Corps, while the Kunduz battalion will be paired with the 2nd Brigade. Gante noted that the 1st ANA Brigade, currently in Mazar-e Sharif, will move to Meymaneh, where it is supposed to be the responsibility of Norway and the other Nordic countries. Gante said the first mission of the German battalion in Mazar-e Sharif will be to deploy to the Baghlan Jadid district in Baghlan Province -- one of the eight ISAF

priority districts in the north -- and conduct insurgency-clearing operations with the ANA. The German battalion, in a complete break with past Bundeswehr practice, will not return to its home base in Mazar at the end of each day, but instead will stay in the district during the entire operation, until the clearing is complete and security responsibility can be handed off to the ANSF. Gante said the expectation was that such an operation could last several weeks. The German battalion will live and operate from a forward operating base (FOB) in the district, established and occupied jointly with the ANA. Gante said that Germany essentially wanted to replicate, on a smaller scale, the "Moshtarak" operation currently being conducted in Helmand Province. The first mission of the German battalion in Kunduz will be to carry out the same kind of operation in the Char Dara District of Kunduz Province, another ISAF priority district.

COMMENT

17. (C) The single most important consideration for Chancellor Merkel in considering a troop increase after the London Conference was keeping as many SPD parliamentarians on board with the ISAF mandate as possible. In that sense, the government has scored a clear political victory in maintaining a broad political consensus on the way forward. As it turned out, the internal coalition negotiation on the troop increase -- given the rivalry between FM Westerwelle and Defense Minister zu Guttenberg -- turned out to be the most difficult, with Westerwelle at the last minute vetoing the original government proposal to increase the troop ceiling by 1000 and insisting on the lower 850 figure. One potential trouble spot on the horizon is the fact that the government, in emphasizing the "training" aspect of the Bundeswehr mission, may not have adequately prepared the German people for the increased casualties that implementation of the new partnering concept could very well bring.

Murphy